



2004 APIA VOTING PROFILES



Washington: Looking Past King County

Total Population: 5,894,121 (2000) Electoral College Votes: 11

Although a steady flow of Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) migration to Washington has existed since the mid-19th century, the more recent surges in the APIA population can be attributed to the 1965 Immigration Act, which resulted in a large influx of skilled and highly educated Asian immigrants, including Chinese, Asian Indians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and the end of the Vietnam War, which created a substantial migration of Southeast Asian populations from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Long stereotyped as passive laborers, APIAs have actually made substantial political inroads and have become an increasingly vocal constituency in Washington state politics. In 1963, Wing Luke became the first Chinese American elected to the Seattle City Council; Ruby Chow, the first Chinese American woman, was elected in 1973; and in 1996, Gary Locke, then King County Executive, was elected as the first APIA American governor on the mainland United States. Such victories were made possible by political coalitions that united Asian Pacific Islander Americans of all ethnicities.

In political as well as cultural terms, Asians began referring to themselves as Asian Americans, or Asian Pacific Americans, reflecting an identity that transcended previous ethnic bonds. Washington State also holds the honor as one of the few states to elect Filipino Americans to its legislature, and is the home of the International District, an area in downtown Seattle where many Asians first settled.

Washington's APIA Growth and Concentrations:

In 2000, the APIA population in Washington was 428,659, which accounted for some 7.3% of the total population in the state, or nearly 1 in 12 residents. Their percentage share of the total state population was also growing the fastest in the entire Pacific Northwest, increasing by 3.3% from 1990 to 2000.

Washington's APIA population is highly concentrated in particular segments of the state, where King County alone held a record 58.3% of the state's APIA population in 1990, and in 2000 accounted for some 53.4% of the population. Despite this high concentration, APIAs are still largely a minority in the county and have found it necessary to build organizational and political bridges into the surrounding communities in order to assert their voice. In Seattle's Central District, where Asian Pacific Islander Americans and African Americans lived in close proximity for nearly six decades, community leaders have often crossed ethnic lines to fight together for public housing, tenant rights, election reform and employment opportunities.

Washington's APIA Voting Age Population as Citizens (2000)

	Total Population	Asian American Population	Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander	Combined APIA
Population, 18 years & Over	4,384,341	281,390	25,655	307,045
Citizens, 18 years & Over	2,228,205	191,122	22,495	213,617
Percent citizens, 18 years & Over	93.2%	67.9%	87.7%	69.6%

Potential APIAs Voters in State	Already Registered APIAs	Target of Unregistered APIAs
141,000	90,000	51,000

APIA's Influence in Washington's Politics:

As of 2000, APIAs constituted 7.0% percent of Washington's voting age population. Of the 307,045 APIAs in 2000 that were of voting age, 69.6% (213,617) were citizens. In the 2000 presidential election, Washington needed 139,000 votes to be captured as a state, a figure significantly below the number of eligible APIA voters in the state. These figures lend us the possibility that APIA votes would be able to assert a strong influence, if not control, in the flow of electoral voting in Washington if mobilized effectively as a united front.

Recent APIA Electoral Success:

A string of recent electoral successes in Washington have increased the credibility of APIAs as viable candidates, at even the highest government positions. In the wake of the success of Governor Gary Locke, State Senator Paul H. Shin (D) won his re-election in the 2002 midterm by 62 to 38 percent in the 21st district. Adding further credence to an increasing trend of entrenched APIA elected officials, Sharon Tomiko Santos easily won her third term as state representative for the 37th district, 87 to 13 percent, and fellow representative Velma Veloria similarly won her re-election bid to office for the 11th district, 65 to 35 percent. In the area of judgeship, Seattle APIAs Mark Chow, Eileen Kato and Mariane Spearman of the Seattle District Court, in addition to Kimi Kondo and Ron Mamiya of the Seattle Municipal Court, were all re-elected to their judgeships without challenge.

Conclusions:

In August of 2002, King County, Washington (which includes Seattle) began providing Chinese-language voting ballots for those requesting them, since over 10,000 citizens of the voting-age population reported that they shared this language and were not proficient in English. This provision to provide bilingual ballots is protected under section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. This is a small but salient example of how the APIA community in the Pacific Northwest is gaining acceptance as an influential and potentially decisive segment of voters. As the APIA population in the Washington and the Pacific Northwest continues to grow in both size and political organization, it is likely that the APIA vote will increasingly assert its influence on statewide and national elections.

Sources:

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